



THE LARGE COMMITTEE

Ian Simpson, Secretary/Manager of John O'Gaunt Golf Club, spoke at the 7th National Conference at Solihull in April 1997.

(reviewed August 2011)

Can we make it work better – the large Committee? I think what immediately springs to mind is perhaps for the organising Secretary/Manager to give the meeting date incorrectly to half the Committee to ensure that the attendance is only the minimum to meet the quorum requirements!

However flippancy will not really assist the cause, although at all times the maintenance of a sense of humour will.

I genuinely applaud **Private Member Clubs** who have moved to a two tier small committee structure - the cliché (small is beautiful) has never rung as true as it does in golf club committee operation. However, whether we like it or not, there are many clubs, mine included, where the larger committee operation works satisfactory and is seen as a more acceptable base for democratic decision making. There is a reasonable and reasoned opinion that the larger the number involvement in democratic decision making the better the democracy and therefore the quality of decision.

That's OK as far as it goes and "quality decision making" is the end product of all our work. For that to happen and for the larger sub-committee to work, I strongly make the following points on which I will expand further:

- ⌘ Clear terms of reference of operation.
- ⌘ Understanding of the difference of management of policy as opposed to the making of policy.
- ⌘ Strong and experienced Chairman.
- ⌘ Carefully constructed budget - annual and longer term plan.
- ⌘ Pro-active sub-committees feeding into the General Committee.
- ⌘ Good reporting from sub-committees.
- ⌘ Education of members of General Committee to prepare for meetings and to pre-discuss topics with appropriate sub-committee Chairman.
- ⌘ Formality of General Committee meetings.
- ⌘ Communication

Terms of Reference

At my Club the following formal notice is read at the beginning of each Committee year - debated and up to now always agreed.

The agreed terms of reference form the basis of operation of the Committee function throughout.

General Committee Terms of Reference

This Committee recognises the Professional Management of the John O'Gaunt Golf Club through its General Manager. It further recognises that the General Manager is responsible for the day to day management of all aspects of the Club House and both Golf Courses associated with the Club.

Reciprocally, the Management will recognise that the John O'Gaunt Golf Club is totally owned by the Club Members, and their requirements, through their elected Committee representatives, will be provided for.

To this extent, the General Committee will determine Policy and where necessary employ external Consultants to achieve this. The resulting Policies will be endorsed by the General Committee and conveyed to the General Manager for implementation.

Management of Policy as opposed to Making of Policy

I am assuming that all but the smallest of member Clubs now recognise that the day to day operation across the board must be vested in professional management - the Golf Club Secretary/Manager.

The management operation must be seen to be made to compliment committee policy with compromise only in very extraordinary circumstances and even then with immediate consultation with the chairman as to why such and such a decision were made.

Elected committee members should be discouraged from involving themselves in the day to day running of the Club - I accept that in some smaller Clubs some involvement with competitions, handicaps, etc is likely. It is also possible that entertainments also fall into a similar category. I, myself, with an administration team of 22 (plus myself) do not invite any participation in managing or administrating the day to day affairs of the Club - if interference is evident and I can assure you that in some occasions it has - certainly with newly elected committee members - I make a point of stressing to that person that as far as that part of the Club's operations concerned - that having indicated his or her wish to involve himself or herself, he or she must assume the whole responsibility for the subject, not just part.

It does not work for more than one person to be in charge of a topic - that one person can thereafter carefully monitor the situation and therefore be responsible for the successful implementation, including delegation etc - the total control must remain at the top of the pyramid (one person). An in and out or partial involvement has never ever worked satisfactorily and probably never will - there is compromise over responsibilities, staff do not know to whom they should report or who should be giving the instructions - confusion exists.

Conversely management (the Golf Club Secretary/Manager) should not personally involve himself or herself in the determination of Club policy - although obviously he or she will be attending meetings during that policy debate in carrying out the secretarial function of his, or her, responsibilities. It is to be hoped that an enlightened committee will seek advice from the professional management on all topics - but the actual policy determination or alteration of existing policy must be left exclusively to the elected body.

Strong Experienced Chairman

This point is a vital part of the whole large committee operation.

An experienced chairman will impose a certain discipline on the meeting and direct and guide quality decision making by his or her own leadership. In my opinion, chairmanship is leadership - history tells us that the better the leadership the better the success of whatever is being attempted to be achieved. Club rules should be framed so as not to make it obligatory for the Club Captain to be Committee Chairman - many of course are very good at it, but many are not.

The selection of the Committee chairman is one of the most important decisions in a Club year.

In general terms elected Committee members will always respond to strong leadership from the Chair provided it is consistent and sympathetic.

There is no doubt that Committee chairmanship is a skill.

Budget

It is absolutely vital that a clear and detailed budget plan is in operation not only for the current year but on a broader base over a period of 5 to 10 years. This should be constantly reviewed and reported on to General Committee through the Finance Sub-committee.

The budget should clearly indicate within the plan expenditure relative to house and course and this will give a clear mandate on spending ability to management but also in policy determination on both these two important and vital spending topics of Golf Club administration.

Pro-active Sub-committees - feeding into the General Committee

The General Committee meeting must not become a talking shop. The talking and investigation work on any topic should be carried out in a less formal atmosphere with few in attendance at a sub-committee.

Again good chairmanship is important and feed from the professionals ie Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper at Course meetings Club Professional at Golf Meetings etc. It is my style to attend all sub-committee meetings except Golf where my assistant is the professional attending and advising.

Professional advisors must be prepared to occasionally be outvoted - no one, not even me, has a monopoly of knowledge. The usual sub-committees in operation monitoring and recommending on their specific areas of control are as under:

- ✈ Finance
- ✈ Course
- ✈ House
- ✈ Golf
- ✈ Special Projects
- ✈ Membership and Discipline
- ✈ Development

Other Sub-Committees can be set up as appropriate.

The meetings should also be controlled by an agenda but will, by definition, be less formal and should be a good discussion forum on the various topics under review. In conjunction with the management function, it is unlikely (apart from golf particularly on handicaps) that sub-committees need meet more than 4 to 5 times in each year. However the meetings can be lengthy and indeed should be if there is much to debate. The usual length of sub-committee meetings at my club vary from 2 to 22 hours.

Sub-Committee Reporting

If the system of the large committee operation is successful, it is absolutely dependant on active sub-committee input.

The reporting of that input is the fulcrum around which the whole operation works. Detailed minutes of each sub-committee should be produced and forwarded to all general committee members in plenty of time before the next organised general committee meeting - the minutes should attempt to highlight both sides of any argument and the reason for any conclusion.

That will enable external discussion to take place and encourage those members of general committee not on that sub-committee to pre-think the topic and discuss any matters giving concern with the appropriate sub-committee chairman prior to the next general committee meeting.

I like to see a concise report attached to the minutes giving a carefully worded recommendation which alone should be considered and voted on by the general committee. Obviously there may be more than one specific recommendation following a sub-committee meeting.

I also like to see reference in the sub-committee minutes to matters simply under discussion and on which no formal recommendation is required. That assures members of general committee not active in a particular sub-committee that the whole operation within the sub-committee mandate is constantly being reviewed and discussed.

General Committee

Obviously formal minutes are prepared and forwarded to all general committee members for each meeting.

(Example of Report)

John O'Gaunt Golf Club House Sub-committee

The House Sub-committee met on Monday, 17th February, 1997 at 7.30 p.m. in the Clubhouse and attached is the Minutes of the Meeting as a précis of the discussions that took place.

Members of General Committee are invited to contact the House Chairman with any points that they may wish to raise prior to the next meeting of General Committee - 24th February, 1997.

Recommendations

The House Committee invites the General Committee to support the undernoted recommendations.

1. Re: - Bar Operation

"The General Manager in conjunction with the Treasurer investigate (to include demonstration) the provision, and benefit of "product tills" and thereafter if deemed to be desirable to effect purchase and installation prior to the busy trading period commencing at the beginning of April 1997."

Note: Costs as indicated in detailed minutes.

2. Re: - Catering Operation

"That any question of review of the Caterers Franchise Agreement be deferred until future years because of reasons given and as detailed in the minutes."

Education of Members

When I first entered the world of golf club administration I was appalled at 4 to 5 hour meetings - which at the end attracted adverse comments from everyone who had attended and who had invariably contributed to that shambles.

Even in 18 hole member clubs the management and the elected committee are responsible for fair sized operations. It all follows therefore that a business like approach to the whole administration function, including the Committee operation, is not only advisable but absolutely necessary. Committee members who enter a committee situation where, it is clearly evident that, thinking and talking starts as soon as the meeting commences are likely to follow that lead - and the shambles will continue.

Committee members who are identified from the chair as not pre-thinking a problem are likely to, very quickly, improve their performance - pre-meeting investigate the pros and cons to any

problem, discuss with others, come to a conclusion and vote appropriately in a business like manner.

The days of glossing over serious problems such as consideration of financial matters, yet prepared to spend lengthy meeting time in discussing the price of a sandwich must be put to bed for ever – unfortunately, I am aware that at some clubs this quite ludicrous situation still in part exists.

The education of committee members on conduct is an important cog in the wheel of a successful large committee operation.

Formality of General Committee Meetings

Was it Rudyard Kipling's Poem - **If**

If the Sub-committees have done their work carefully.

If the reporting has been timeous, explanatory and detailed;

If the conclusions of sub-committees are clearly and concisely included in the formal recommendations from that sub-committee.

If the spending sub-committees operate within budget or liaise with Finance Sub-committee if in difficulty in doing so;

If members of general committee prepare for general committee meetings in commercial and business like manner.

If the chairman performs with clear leadership.

If all members of general committee remember the terms of reference of their elected position and respect the opinion of others.

If the club management is pro-active yet understanding of the committee position. Democracy will follow - and decision making will be clearly thought and concise. There is absolutely no need for general committee meetings to last longer than a relatively short time and formal conduct through the chair should ensure such.

It is amazing that the doing away with 5 hour general committee meetings will filter through the membership and attract the better quality, more commercially minded, lateral thinking member whose success in life invariably discourages him or her wasting their time on unnecessary and inconclusive waffle. It follows that the better the quality of committee member, the likelihood of better decision making.

Whilst advocating formality on the conduct of meetings I, we, encourage at our Club the use of agenda heading "Any Other Business" for general committee members to raise any points or concerns that they wish to be discussed at future sub-committee meetings and thereafter following any recommendation, the general committee.

Formality is a means of committee control - it is not meant nor is it intended that it should restrict elected members from contributing to the democratic function.

Communication

Whilst not an integral part of the committee operation, good and open member communication certainly compliments the committee function. It is no use being dependant on posting notices, as a method of communication - we all know what happens to those. A more pro-active approach is required. Use of newsletters etc posted to Club members. Display of Budget for the following year together with the Treasurer's statement etc.

Conclusion

The large committee - you have heard the theory - does it work in practise. Well in my case, whilst utopia has not been reached, the improvement in the position over the past seven years has been immense and meetings of general committee at John O'Gaunt rarely exceed 12 hours even with a very full agenda. Decision making is concise and a clear mandate is thereby given to management.

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